

SR 167 HOT LANES PILOT PROJECT TOLL SETTING WORKSHOP

BRIEFING PAPER

Prepared for the
July 2007 TRANSPORTATION COMMISSION MEETING

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PURPOSE:

The purpose of this workshop is threefold:

1. Provide an overview of the Toll Operations & Maintenance Organization and the role of this organization in respect to the Transportation Commission's toll rate setting process for the SR 167 HOT Lanes Pilot Project.
2. Provide the Transportation Commission with an overview of the SR 167 HOT Lanes Pilot Project
3. Provide an overview of dynamic pricing and the application of pricing to the SR 167 HOT Lanes Pilot Project with an emphasis in the following areas:
 - a. Review of enabling legislation
 - b. Review of the operational and toll rate setting roles & responsibilities
 - c. Setting minimum and maximum toll rates
 - d. Enforcement
 - e. Rate setting administrative process
 - f. Proposed schedule and process for Transportation Commission toll rate setting.

ACTION/OUTCOME:

Information only.

BACKGROUND:

The Tolling Operations (B Program) was authorized in the recently passed transportation budget and includes a new program at WSDOT, Toll Operations and Maintenance. This program provides for the establishment of a new organization dedicated to statewide tolling operations that will be based in Headquarters Traffic Operations.

One of the first steps of this organization is to begin building the foundational elements of the team. Fortunately, a strong foundation has been already in place with the established tolls team that has been part of the Olympic Region Tacoma Narrows Bridge Project Office. David Pope, who previously guided this Tacoma Narrows Bridge tolling team will move into a statewide role as the Tolls Policy and Planning Manager and will be available to consult with and help guide the various toll project teams to ensure an interoperable & workable tolling system. David will also take lead responsibility in

working with the Transportation Commission in its role of establishing toll rate policy, as now for the SR 167 HOT lanes pilot. The Tolls Operations Manager, Lucinda Broussard will help ensure that the system operates effectively and efficiently and will take the lead in working operational and enforcement issues with Northwest and Olympic regions, Traffic Operations, Washington State Patrol and the Pierce County Court System. She will also work with tolling projects that are coming on line to help implement the statewide integration, tolling systems and tolling back office functions. Janet Matkin will assume a new role as Tolls Communication Manager and Brian Tinney has accepted the position as Tolls Business Manager.

The SR 167 HOT lanes pilot project, authorized by the legislature in RCW 47.56.401 & 403 is a four-year pilot project that will convert nine miles of high-occupancy vehicle (HOV) lanes to high-occupancy toll (HOT) lanes on SR 167 between Renton and Auburn. The SR 167 HOT lanes will provide toll-free, express trips for transit and carpools, and also allow solo-drivers who pay a toll to use the lanes when there is space for more vehicles. Solo drivers will need to open an account to get a Good To Go! transponder to mount on their windshield. The tolls will be debited from the driver's pre-paid account electronically upon entry — there will be no toll booths. Tolls are used to keep traffic in the HOT lanes flowing at 45 mph or faster, even when the regular lanes are congested.

Flexible pricing is what keeps the lane free of congestion at all times: the price will adjust up or down depending on the space available in the HOT lane. Drivers can choose to use the HOT lanes, or they can stay in the regular lanes. Drivers with Good To Go! transponders who carpool with two or more people in the car will need to deactivate the transponder so they won't get charged when using the SR 167 HOT lanes.

The Transportation Commission has been designated by statute to set the toll schedule for the SR 167 HOT lanes and a toll schedule needs to be in place in late 2007. During this presentation, WSDOT staff will present an outline of the tasks and required schedule to complete toll setting.

DISCUSSION:

Toll rates for the 167 HOT lanes must be in place by late 2007 in order to conduct the public information campaign. HOT lanes are a new choice for motorists, and what they might expect to pay if they chose to use HOT lanes is an important communication for those potential users. WSDOT will start public information workshops and media messages to inform motorists of how to use the lanes, their options and the likely prices at opening.

The Transportation Commission toll rate setting for SR 167 HOT lanes will be different from TNB setting in two main areas:

1. There are no statutory requirements to repay any debt or to pay operations and maintenance costs. There is also no requirement for a citizen's advisory committee.
2. Instead of a rate schedule as the Commission set for Tacoma Narrows Bridge, the Commission will need to set a minimum and maximum rate for the SR 167 HOT lanes so that the dynamic pricing software can calculate the needed rate to maintain mandatory performance measures.

The main commission rate setting workshop should be this fall. WSDOT recommends that the workshop be held in conjunction with the meeting in Bellingham in October. The alternative would be a special meeting. If the Commission wants to hold public hearings, the hearings need to be completed by the end of November so that a rate plan can be approved in December.

During the presentation, WSDOT staff will present SR 167 Roles and Responsibilities for the Toll Operations and Maintenance organization, a SR 167 HOT lanes Pilot Project overview, a review of enabling legislation and a dynamic pricing overview. Staff will outline the proposed SR 167 HOT lanes toll setting schedule and next Commission actions.

RECOMMENDATION:

While there will be an opportunity for the Commissioners to ask questions, no action is required at this time.

For further information, contact: David Pope, WSDOT Tolls Policy & Planning Manager, 253-534-4673.